



JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 242 Testimony
Senate Committee on Education
Room 201 SE
10:00 a.m.

Chairman Lehman and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on Senate Bill 242.

St. Mary's Catholic School in Auburndale was closed on June 7 with very little notice given to parents and students. While about 31 of the 39 elementary students are residents of the Auburndale School District and are expected to enter Auburndale schools this fall, the remaining students who live just across the border in another school district were unable to enroll there because they missed the open enrollment deadline of February 23.

There are now four students who would like to remain in the Auburndale School District—two from Stevens Point and two from Marshfield. These students have grown up in Auburndale schools and their parents would like them to continue to learn in the environment they are accustomed to.

This bill would allow their parents to apply, within five days after the effective date of this bill, to attend a public school in the Auburndale School District under the Open Enrollment Program.

The Open Enrollment Program is intended to allow parents to choose which school their children will attend, as long as they meet certain conditions. The four families would have met these conditions, but because of the late notice, they were unable to even apply. The Auburndale School District is willing to accept the students if this bill passes.

Auburndale Superintendent Gerald Eichman is present today to provide additional information and to welcome any questions you may have for him.

If you have any additional questions for me, please feel free to call me at (715) 342-0526.

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2007 SENATE BILL 242

My name is Gerald Eichman. I am the District Administrator for the School District of Auburndale. I have been in my current position almost 2 months. I am here today representing the School District of Auburndale and wishing to voice the district's support for Senate Bill 242.

Although I have only been in my current position for the past two months, I have been an educator and administrator in Wisconsin for the past 32 years. I have always believed that parents should have a voice in their children's education. I believe that the state legislature must have had a similar belief in crafting open enrollment legislation that allows parents to make choices about the child's education. I applaud this.

As a District Administrator who has had to build many tough school district budgets, I know how important it is to have specific timelines to predict enrollments that help us build budgets and staff programs. I understand the Department of Public Instruction's resistance to an exception that may cause a hardship on another school district. But in education, it is about children and parents – often times it is also about exceptions. This is why I am here today on behalf of the Auburndale School District asking for your support.

First and foremost, allowing the students who attended St. Mary's Parochial School to attend Auburndale Elementary School under open enrollment for the 2007-08 school year will not create any financial hardship on any district. The students in questions have not previously been enrolled in their resident district. Therefore the resident school district will not see a loss in revenue for the 2007-08 school year. In fact, I believe the resident school district is more likely to gain by allowing for these students to be open enrolled beginning with the upcoming school year.

What I have experienced is that parents who have no other recourse will take whatever measures necessary to have their children attend the school of their choice. Parents will find a way to establish residency within the nonresident district prior to the start of the school. They will enroll their child within the non-resident district as a resident student. As the year progresses, they may seek a "Current Year" tuition waiver and move back to their former district. The original resident district does not count the student and receives no student aid during this school year. I truly believe that this is a common practice within the state.

St. Mary's Parochial School closed without a timely notice to the parents. I would surmise from the parents strong desire to open enroll their children in the Auburndale School District, had they known in January of 2007 that St. Mary's School may close and that they may need to open enroll, they would have done

so. The parents have made it known that they plan to open enroll their children at the earliest possible date and that they will attend the Auburndale School District starting in 2008-09.

Allowing the St. Mary's students to open enroll in the Auburndale School District for the 2007-08 school year is a win, win, win situation. First the parents win as they are allowed to choose the school for the children. Second, the resident school district wins as they are allowed to count the student for FTE purposes and will be able to generate school revenues starting with the 2007-08 school year. Lastly, the non-resident school district (Auburndale) wins, as they will receive additional students and open enrollment revenues.

Allowing the few St. Mary's children, who were not residents of the Auburndale School District, to follow their former classmates into Auburndale Elementary School provides a smoother transition for them, particularly if the parents are determined to open enroll them the next school year. It does not create a significant increase in revenues for the Auburndale School District nor does it create a financial burden on the district. Equally, allowing or disallowing these children to open enroll has a minimal affect on the non-resident school districts involved. The only group that will be seriously affected by your decision will be a small handful of very young children; and to them and their parents your decision is very serious.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Education
FROM: John Hubscher, Executive Director
DATE: August 23, 2007
RE: One-Time, Limited Extension of Open Enrollment Application Deadline

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference supports Senate Bill 242, which provides a one-time, limited extension of the application deadline for the Open Enrollment Program in the Auburndale School District.

St. Mary's Catholic School closed its doors permanently at the end of this past school year, alerting parents and pupils of this decision after the application deadline for the Open Enrollment Program in the Auburndale School District had passed. Although St. Mary's is located within Auburndale, many of its students reside in other public school districts. Without the extension of the Open Enrollment Program's application deadline for these students, former pupils could be precluded from continuing their education with the same classmates and families that they have come to rely upon within their school community.

Deadlines are administratively necessary and essential for the fair administration of laws. However, in exceptional circumstances, we must act with compassion and flexibility for individuals affected by situations beyond their control. This is especially important when strict adherence to administrative procedure could detrimentally affect the educational development of a child.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to support SB 242 and provide the former students of St. Mary's Catholic School in Auburndale with a one-time extension of the Open Enrollment Program's application deadline in the Auburndale School District.